ANDREW MARR:
What happened to Ann Clwyd’s husband is of course a single case. Nursing is an extremely demanding job; people come from all over the world to do it here, and of course the nurse who killed herself after the hoax call from Australia was one of them. But there is something wrong, is there not, in the culture of some hospitals? I’m joined now by Dr Peter Carter who’s Chief Executive of the Royal College of Nursing. Thank you very much indeed for coming in, Dr Carter. The Health Secretary himself has talked about the normalisation of cruelty in some of our hospitals, and going beyond you know one-off cases something seems to be going wrong in the culture.

PETER CARTER:
Well first of all I have every sympathy with the situation that Ann Clwyd found herself in. And one of the things I say when I get these accounts (because people write to me), it’s absolutely essential that that individual case is investigated because far too often we get these accounts often weeks, months, maybe years after they’ve occurred, and what I think needs to happen now - and I know the hospital in Cardiff will want to do this - that has to be investigated. And I need to be clear: if an individual nurse or other healthcare worker is culpable and there are no mitigating circumstances, then
individuals have to be held to account. I believe that most nurses, the vast majority of nurses still uphold the long and well respected traditions that we associate with the nursing profession. However, the Royal College of Nursing have been quite clear: there are real strains in the system. Now I genuinely believe and 92 per cent of patients that complete surveys express high degrees of satisfaction with their care. Eight per cent do not. Now if I can just pursue that point very briefly. The NHS is a massive organisation. It treats a million people every thirty-six hours. Statistically 920,000 people are feeling good about it; 80,000 are feeling very bad about it. And if your mother or one of your relatives is in that 80,000, you want to say what is going on.

ANDREW MARR:
What about Ann Clwyd’s point? She said that the wrong … a lot of the wrong people are going into nursing - people who expect as it were a sort of semi white collar career and all the rest rather than the old-fashioned do the difficult, tough, gritty jobs and be there alongside patients as much as possible. A lot of people would say to her yes she’s got a point there.

PETER CARTER:
Yes and I hear that a lot. However, we had an independent commission chaired by Lord Willis, a very distinguished individual. In his commission, he busts the myth that if you’ve got a degree, you can’t be caring. It truly is absurd. The last thing I want to do is to take issue with Ann Clywd. But how can you possibly make a correlation between the fact that someone is well educated and they can’t care? The other fact is this. The whole nursing degree profession issue doesn’t actually kick in until next year, so most nurses currently don’t have a degree; so to suggest it’s because they’re degree educated, that falls at the first hurdle. But what I do accept …

ANDREW MARR:
(over) I …

PETER CARTER:
Sorry.
ANDREW MARR:
If I can just break in there. I think her argument was more not that they can’t care or feel compassion because they’re educated; but because they have come into the profession in that way or are coming into the profession that way, they feel themselves if you like not expected to do some of the really unpleasant, gritty, hard, backbreaking, you know messy work that nurses have to do.

PETER CARTER:
Well we get that a lot in some areas. And what I would say is when I visit hospitals, which I do every week, nurses are doing those back breaking tasks. I simply do not accept the case that nurses are not interested in the fundamentals of patient care.

ANDREW MARR:
Are you happy to work with Ann Clwyd if she runs this campaign?

PETER CARTER:
(over) Oh a… Well I don’t think she needs to campaign. I think we need to understand what is going on. And what we do know is we’ve got a healthcare system that is really under strain, particularly with the care of older people. And if you look at so many of these accounts, it’s usually with the care of older people; and what you find there is that the majority of the workforce tend to be healthcare assistants, often under the supervision of a registered nurse. There’s nothing wrong with healthcare assistants, but there is something wrong where healthcare assistants aren’t given even the most rudimentary training.

ANDREW MARR:
I should ask you about the terrible case in the London hospital, the nurse who killed herself after that hoax call. Does that say something about the sort of psychological pressures? That’s the other side of the coin on a lot of nurses.

PETER CARTER:
Well absolutely. However, we don’t know the full circumstances and I don’t wish to speculate. But as others have said, this is the problem, this is the fallout from these
hoaxes and we’ve seen them in the past. It’s rarely it has such a dramatic effect that it’s had on this occasion and right now our thoughts are with Jacinta’s husband and her two children. It’s a tragedy that was avoidable.

ANDREW MARR:
Alright. Thank you very much indeed …

PETER CARTER:
Thank you.

ANDREW MARR:
… for joining us this morning.

INTERVIEW ENDS